

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 13 January 1969



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
13 JANUARY 1969

1. Middle East

Lebanese nervousness over the Israeli threat is increasing. Some of this may stem from fear that De Gaulle may not make good on his promise of "total support"--which the Lebanese apparently believed included French troops if necessary.

We are not certain that French troops were indeed offered. As former colonials of the French, the Lebanese would have highly mixed feelings about accepting them. Their misgivings might fade, however, if the crunch became greater.

2. Israel-France

Those two French-built patrol boats that the Israelis recently spirited away, under the pretext of a pre-delivery test, arrived at Haifa last Friday.

3. South Korea

Pak is setting the machinery in motion for a third-term try in 1971. A nationwide campaign to generate public support for removing the two-term constitutional limit will start soon. To undercut criticism of the regime's most glaring fault, the campaign's first step is said to be an anticorruption drive aimed at civil servants, the press, and perhaps some politicians.

4. Czechoslovakia

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movements-- 50X1

at present of unknown size--probably have to do with joint Soviet-Czechoslovak maneuvers, possibly in reaction to NATO exercises in West Germany. While they do not appear related to internal Czechoslovak political developments, they may raise further fears among the populace of renewed Soviet intervention.

5. Brazil

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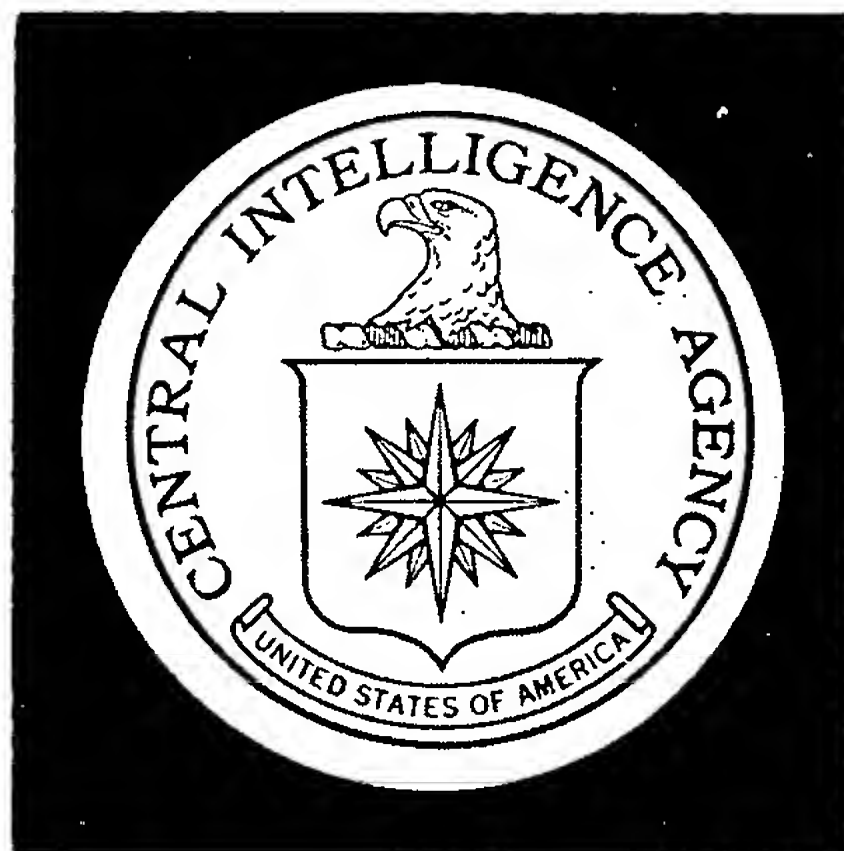
Foreign Minister Magalhaes Pinto is reported ready to hand in his resignation as a protest against the government's assumption of dictatorial powers last month. He is no doubt aware that his popularity among the military is waning, and he may want to jump the gun on his ouster. More than that, his long-standing presidential ambitions may have persuaded him that now is the time to establish himself as a rallying point for the moderates.

6. Nationalist China

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of US
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Hanoi's Plans for Paris:

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the Communists do not expect any significant progress in the Paris talks for at least another month while the new US administration reviews the Vietnam situation.

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the Communists will use this interim period to launch several strong military offensives. The targets will be Americans, not South Vietnamese.

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First Liberation Front Commentary on Appointment of Ambassador Lodge: In contrast to the guarded reaction of Communist spokesmen in Paris, Liberation Radio broadcasting in Vietnamese on 12 January was harsh and denigrating. The broadcast belittled Ambassador Lodge's past experience in Vietnam and took the line that Saigon instead of rejoicing ought to remember that under Lodge the US "changed horses" and overthrew the Diem government. Using this lead, the commentary launched into the Communists' favorite current theme that it is time for the US to replace the present Saigon government.

The commentary called both Lodge and Harriman "old foxes" and said that President-elect Nixon had chosen a man known for his defeats on the battlefield to replace another known for his defeats at the Paris talks.

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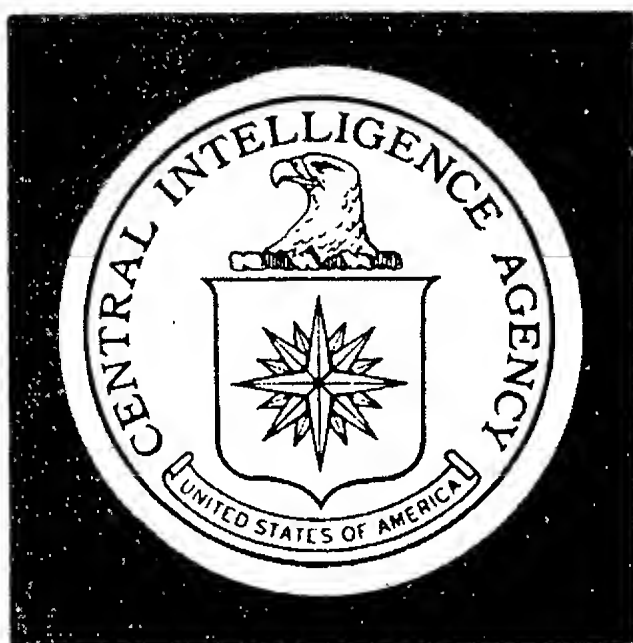
North Vietnamese Air Defense Exercise: On 11 January, the North Vietnamese conducted what appears to have been the first air defense exercise involving the entire air defense network at one time. They appeared to be testing some sophisticated new radars against all types of simulated US aircraft. The results were good; activity was well coordinated, information was passed smoothly and on a timely basis.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

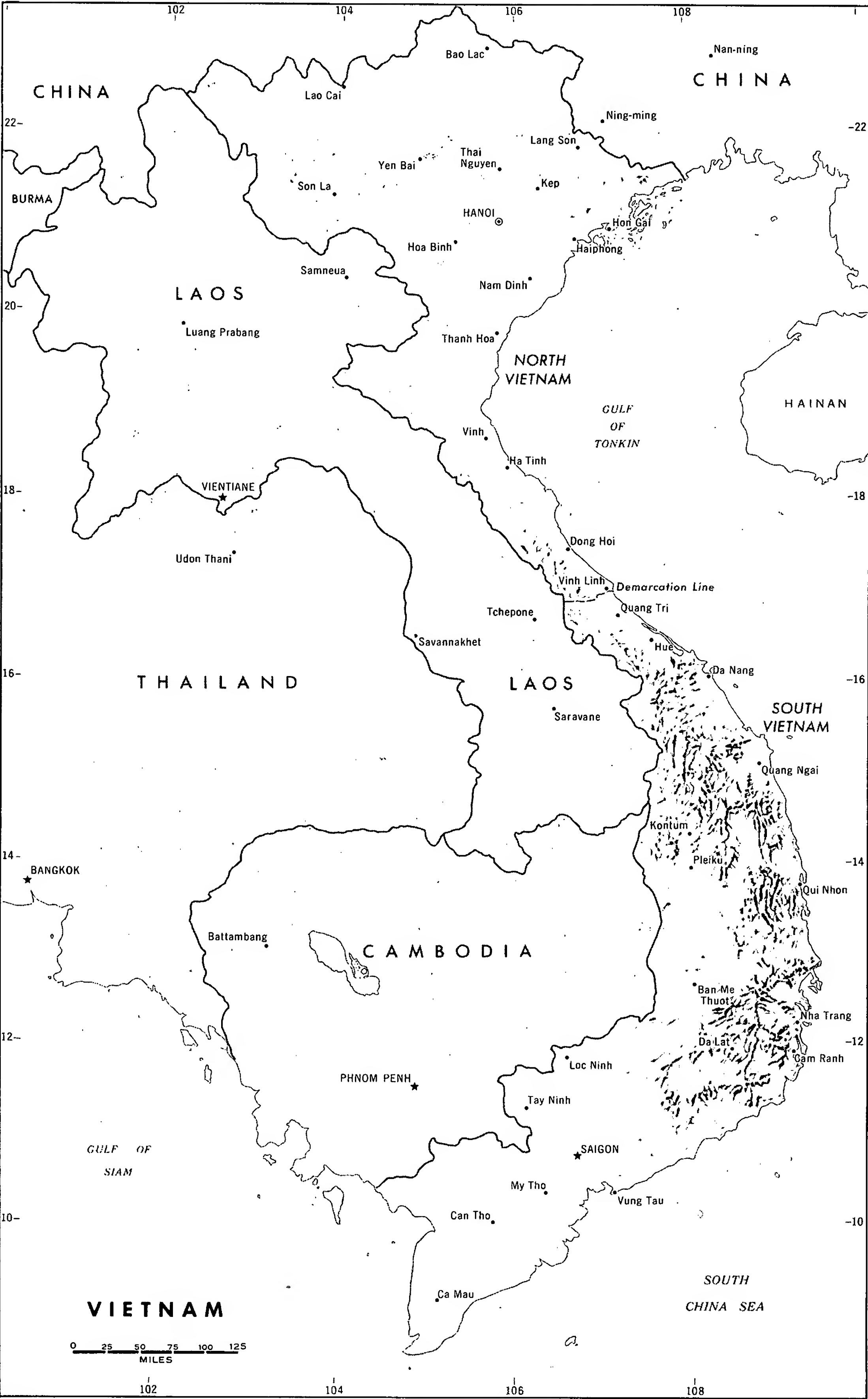
EUROPE

Mindful of last November's run on the franc, the European Community is considering a proposal for greater monetary cooperation among the Six. The draft before the Monetary Committee envisages that members running into payments troubles could first draw on automatic credit facilities; if these proved insufficient, further credits would be available on certain conditions. Progress in the Committee is likely to be slow, and the finance ministers are unlikely to agree on any cooperative mechanism of this sort before the latter half of 1969.

Like all such schemes, this one confronts the chronic question of whether the Six would prefer to consult and act together as individual states, or to delegate new powers to the EC Commission and thus take a further step toward real integration. The current monetary proposal stresses the first of these methods, but this tendency is under continuing fire.

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VIETNAM

The North Vietnamese rejected Vance's offer on Saturday of a table divided by a strip of baize coupled with an offer that the Communist side can speak first at the opening expanded meeting. Lau also turned aside our second proposal of a table divided only by a line and a speaking order of AA BB to be determined by drawing two lots. The Communists are aware that the US is putting heavy pressure on Saigon to agree to the North Vietnamese proposal and they probably believe that Saigon will soon give in. If the allied fallback position on a round table and on a two-sided draw for speaking order is proposed to the Communists, our bet would be that they will buy it and that the way will be opened for the first expanded meeting.

* * *

Liberation Front officials in Paris are now promoting the idea of a "peace cabinet" in which Thieu, Ky and Huong would be replaced by men with whom the Front would be able to deal.

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Vietnamese Communist spokesmen around the world have recently been holding out this same bait on the chance that US unhappiness with the Thieu government might have reached

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the point where a Communist hint of being ready to deal with some compromise figure would spark a response from Washington. General "Big" Minh's name has cropped up in several of these conversations but the Communists clearly do not want to pin themselves down on any one name.

* * *

Numerous reports continue to point to an imminent Communist military offensive. Thus far, however, the Communists have limited themselves to a series of shellings of allied bases on 11-12 January. The enemy probably plans to step up the level of his attacks over the next few weeks in order to demonstrate his capability to stay in the field despite heavy allied military pressure.

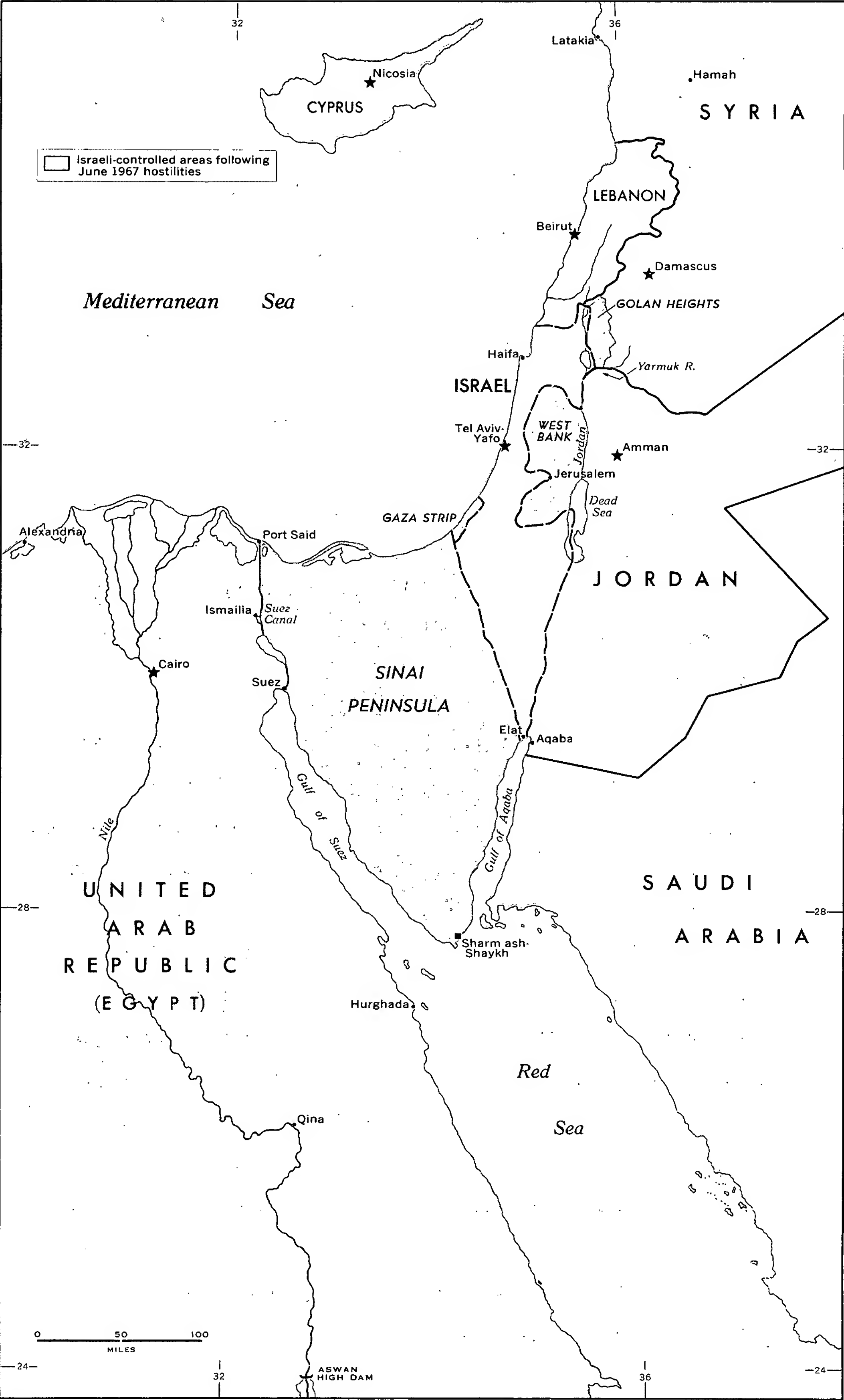
Thus far in January about one new infiltration group per day has been noted entering the pipeline in North Vietnam. This is the same rate noted in early December and is good evidence that the Communists anticipate taking heavy casualties for which they will need replacements during the next few months.

SOVIET SPHERE

 Soviet space support ships, which are on station in the Atlantic Ocean to support a manned space launch, may accomplish or rehearse some phase of the operation today. Soviet instrumentation ships are also on station in the Pacific and recovery forces have been deployed in the USSR.

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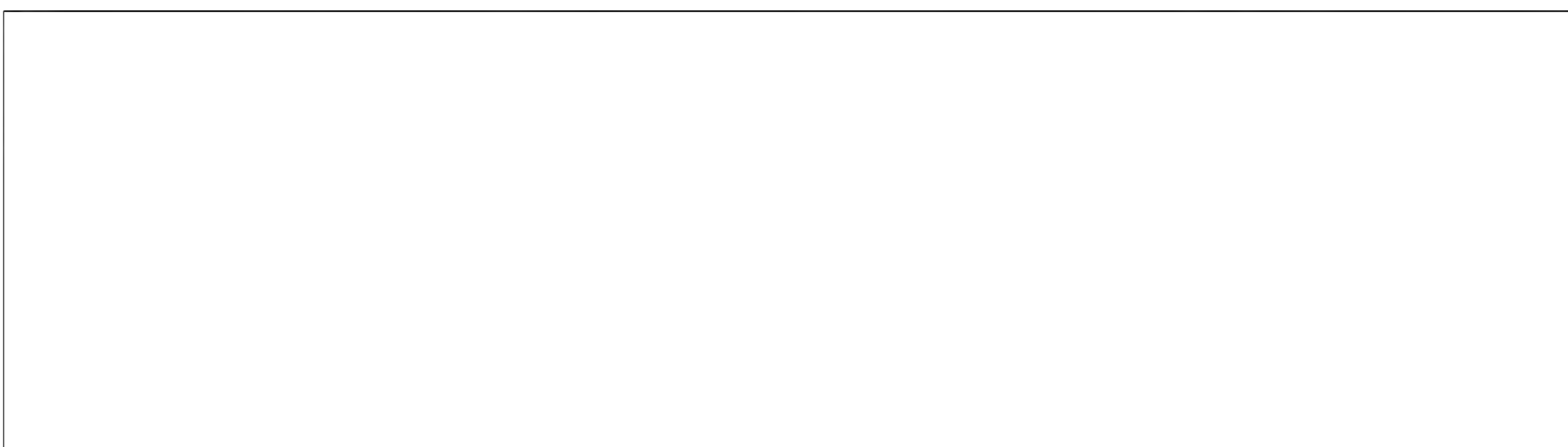


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MIDDLE EAST

Arab news media are now reporting that Israel is massing troops for a large-scale raid into Jordan, timed to present the incoming US administration with a fait accompli. There seems to be no evidence substantiating the Arab claims.



This mounting Arab hysteria will surely be fed by any incidents such as last weekend's attack by Israeli jets on suspected Arab commando positions in Jordan.

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The Israelis

now fear that the Arabs are becoming trigger happy. An Israeli spokesman has explained the situation to US officials, assured them that no such plan is in the offing, and asked them to "let the other side know they can relax." The Israelis allege that the Soviets are responsible for inciting Arab countries into this state of alert, but we have no information to support this claim. The Arabs are fully capable of working themselves into a frenzy, with the help of recent Israeli actions against Lebanon and Jordan. Israeli statements are also helping fan the flames; Deputy Premier Allon today warned that if the Arabs did not cooperate in finding acceptable Arab-Israeli boundaries, then "Israel can achieve those secure boundaries herself."

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The Lebanese are still convinced that an attack is coming, although the arrival of De Gaulle's personal envoy, Georges Gorse, on 11 January may have had a calming effect. Initial Lebanese impressions of the extent of French offers of aid seem to have been overly optimistic, and no public statements spelling out the details have been made since Gorse's arrival. He has, however, announced that France will not remain idle if Lebanon's security is endangered.

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The Lebanese continue their efforts to crack down on terrorist raids and deprive Israel of any pretext for an attack.

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Their failure illustrates the growing power of Arab commando organizations.

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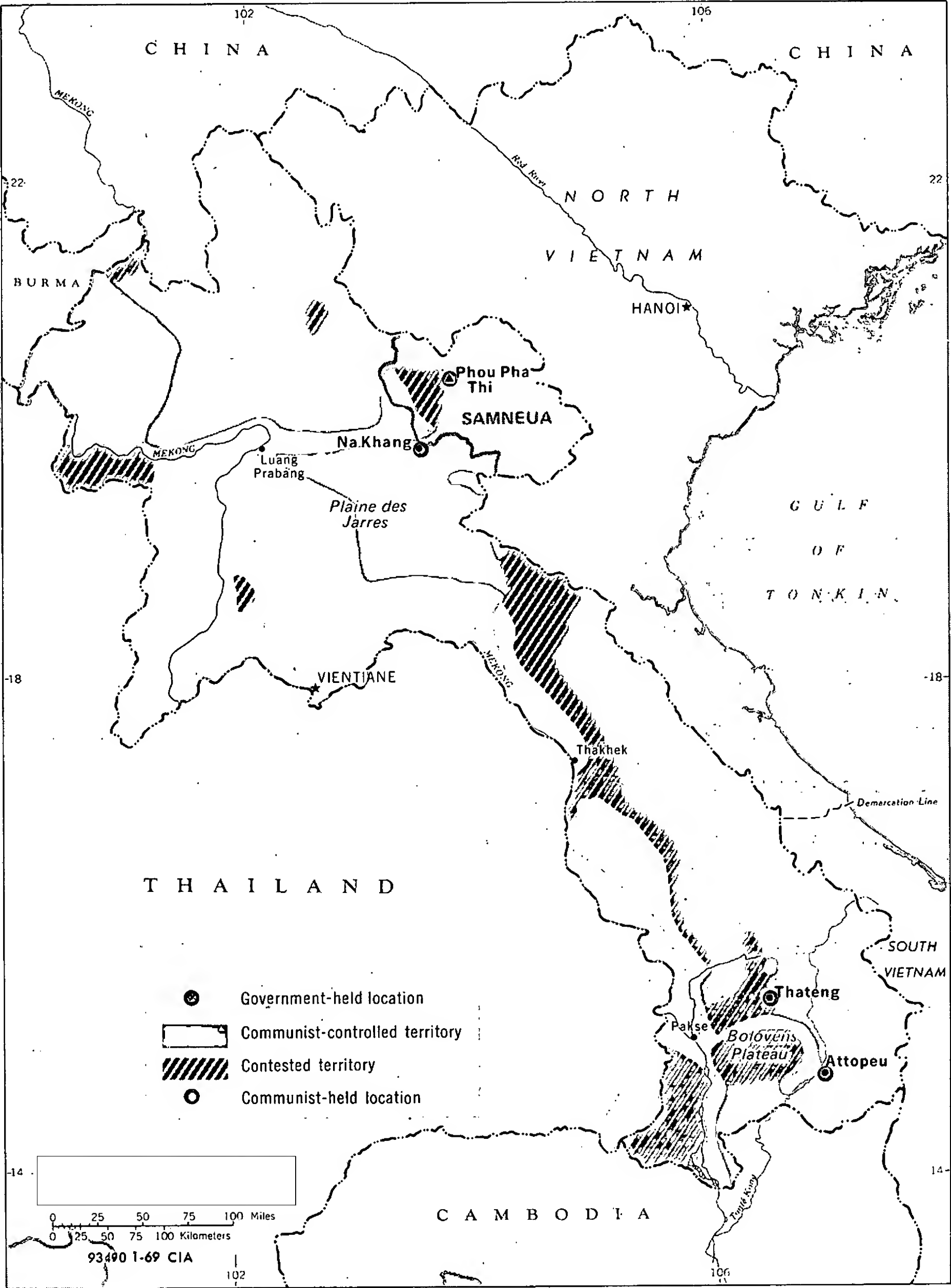
Eban has agreed to meet secretly with Jarring in Zurich this Tuesday and Wednesday. Jarring is telling only the US and the Soviets about the meeting. He hopes word will not get back to the Israelis that we have been informed.

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At annex we take a look at some of the ingredients that make the Middle East so explosive at this time.

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LAOS: Current Situation



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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

LAOS

North Vietnamese forces positioned along the eastern rim of the Bolovens Plateau yesterday attacked the government garrison at Ban Thateng with heavy mortar fire and limited ground probes. This appears to be a fresh campaign, after a three-week respite, to force the government out of this strategically located position.

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Evidence continues to mount that the Thateng operation is part of a wider Communist effort to reduce the government's presence around the Bolovens.

In the north, the enemy is consolidating his hold in the Phou Pha Thi area. North Vietnamese reinforcements have overrun several outlying government bases in recent days and it appears to be only a matter of time before most of the government's gains of the past several months will be lost. The situation at Na Khang, where the next major Communist effort in the northeast may come, is quiet.

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III. ANNEX

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI SITUATION

The rapid growth of irrational Arab terrorism has become the most aggravating problem in the Arab-Israeli impasse. Terrorist actions are expanding in both frequency and scope. Rivalries between the several terrorist organizations and the irresponsibility of their leadership compound the problem. The growing public popularity of the terrorist movement has left Arab political leaders, such as Nasir and King Husayn, on the sidelines helplessly watching their own influence and power erode. Meanwhile, the terrorists' popularity has forced all Arab leaders into greater cooperation with the terrorists.

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Lebanon, which up to now had managed to remain uninvolved, is the latest victim of this expanding disruptive force. Caught between militants, mostly Muslim, Arab Nationalist elements, and the traditionally pro-Western Christian sector, the country's political leaders have become increasingly paralyzed while awaiting what they believe to be an inevitable Israeli strike. Such an attack could only increase their ineffectiveness and could result in the loss of territory in southern Lebanon.

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The French arms embargo has brought about a contemptuous anger toward France, Israel's old ally and arms supplier. At the same time Israel sees itself threatened by a Soviet-US "peace" deal. Israel fears that the Soviet Union aims at getting it to relinquish the Arab territory it now holds without a firm and durable peace treaty with the Arabs.

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Moscow probably has several motivations in proposing its peace plan. It wishes to minimize the possibility of another outbreak of war, which could well create a crisis between it and the US. It may also wish to lessen the threat that Moscow's Arab client regimes might be toppled as a consequence of the continued stalemate and the rise of terrorist influence. Of course the USSR would also benefit if the Suez Canal were reopened. What Moscow may not realize is that it may be too late to cut down the terrorist menace to the Arab regimes and that, even if Nasir and Husayn were to make peace, they are not likely to be able to make it stick with the terrorists. Many elements in the several Arab armies sympathize with terrorism. The general Western and US view is that,

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while the plan cannot be accepted in toto, it may provide a basis on which to build.

Jarring's Mission, long nearly moribund, might get a new lease on life because of the Soviet peace proposals. With the active support of the Soviet Union in the peace-making process, Jarring may feel sufficiently encouraged to continue his conversations with the parties. Thus Moscow's plan may serve to slow temporarily the rapid deterioration of the situation in the Middle East, but the prospects are slim that it can be anything but a palliative, and it may end in hardened positions all around. There will be no letup in terrorism, since the terrorists have no intention of making peace with Israel and the Israelis will stick firmly to their reprisal formula. Thus, a somewhat expanded irregular military action probably will develop.

The chance of another war may increase in the months ahead. Unless the Soviets intervened, any all-out war in the next few months would be lost by the Arabs. The dispersal of aircraft and the extensive building of aircraft shelters by Egypt would probably make an Israeli victory more costly and the war would last much longer than in June 1967. This would open the possibility of an expansion of the conflict.

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